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NSC BRIEFING

17 September 1958

SOVIET NUCLEAR TESTS

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I. There has been mounting [redacted] evidence recently of Soviet preparations for the imminent resumption of nuclear tests in the Novaya Zemlya area. [redacted]

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A. A Soviet Ministry of Defense announcement that an area approximately 100,000 square miles around and including Novaya Zemlya would be closed to foreign ships and aircraft from 20 September to 25 October. During this period the Northern Fleet will conduct maneuvers which will include the "actual use of various types of modern weapons."

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- II. In the political arena, Khrushchev on 30 August stated that continued US-UK testing "relieves the Soviet Union of the obligation (to cease tests) it had assumed unilaterally" last March. Despite this, Soviet spokesmen have so far refrained from any unequivocal announcement of a test resumption.
- A. However, Khrushchev's statement and a recent flurry of propaganda may have been intended to justify in advance a resumption of testing.
1. In a letter to UN Secretary-General on 16 September proposing that the question of test cessation be included on the agenda of the present General Assembly session, Gromyko charged US and UK are trying to take advantage of the Soviet moratorium "to secure military advantages for themselves."
- III. A resumption of tests in the near future would tend to undermine the USSR's debating position in the UN.
- A. However, the Kremlin may believe the need to keep pace with recent US-UK nuclear progress outweighs the political disadvantages of renewed testing.
- IV. A further consideration may be a desire for a fresh demonstration of Soviet nuclear prowess to bolster the Soviet bargaining position in the Geneva talks on a test cessation scheduled for 31 October.

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- A. Moscow probably views these talks as the climax of its long campaign to force the West to agree to a test ban independent of other aspects of disarmament.
- V. Finally Khrushchev may wish to remind the world of Soviet power during the Far Eastern crisis.

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